

COUNCIL

Agenda # \_\_\_\_\_

MEETING OF November 9, 2004



## **STAFF REPORT**

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### **DISCUSSION AND DIRECTION REGARDING EXPANDED USE OF CHANNEL 27**

Mayor and City Council of the City of Belmont

#### **Summary**

On September 28, 2004, Council requested that staff research the possibilities for the use of Channel 27 that would have low financial impact on the City. These possibilities include the use of bulletin boards to advise Belmont's viewing audience of events such as Council and Planning Commission meetings. Special events could also be advertised in a timely fashion. Included in that discussion was a reference made regarding web streaming of Council meetings.

#### **Background and Discussion**

Channel changes were made on August 23, 2003 that kept Peninsula TV (PenTV) broadcasting on Channel 26 and creating Channel 27 for City use on the Comcast Cable Channels. This gave the City the ability to broadcast our own programming including City Council meetings on Channel 27. When City Council meetings are broadcast, our signal overrides PenTV broadcasting on Channel 27 only in Belmont. In the absence of any Belmont broadcasts, PenTV also broadcasts on Channel 27. PenTV remains full time on Channel 26.

There is a wide variety of possibilities for the use of Channel 27. These range from original programming to static slides containing information, i.e. a bulletin board. Other options include rebroadcasting Council meetings at various times and broadcasting video shows produced by others. A sampling of our neighboring cities shows how they use their dedicated channel.

For example:

- Foster City – This city is the most active channel of the four listed. They have their own broadcast equipment, which gives additional flexibility. They broadcast live Council, Planning and Parks and Recreation meetings and rebroadcast, special meetings, original productions acquired programming from other sources and a graphic-rich bulletin board when no other programming is shown. Web streaming of the channel is on the Internet.
- San Carlos – Web streaming of the channel on the Internet, a Character Generator with city information, plus the channel is used for live Council Meeting broadcasts and miscellaneous city informational videos.
- San Mateo – Council and Planning Commission live and rebroadcast on a daily basis. When rebroadcasting is not present, a bulletin board is running with citywide information.
- Redwood City – Broadcast live Council Meetings, bulletin board and acquired video clips.

Given the current budget and staff constraints, as well as the intent staff understood from Council's direction, only low cost static information options should be considered at this time.

The City cable television information channel, Channel 27, is available for basic, text only or a text and graphics system as a means for a community/local cable TV Bulletin Board. This Bulletin Board can be broadcast at times specified, or at all times when a Council meeting is not being broadcast.

Equipment purchases are considered to be minimal and staff time depends on direction by Council as to how much and what type of information is to be published. The initial setup of the system hardware is anticipated to take approximately 16 hours and cost of approximately \$2500. Staff's understanding is thought to be static information about Council and Commission meetings plus timely announcements of City events. Council, Commission agendas and meeting times could be posted, for example, as well as information on events such as the Art and Wine Festival.

It is estimated that each message posted will take about 30 minutes of staff time to prepare and post. As this will involve all departments and is an important public information tool, it should be coordinated out of the City Manager's Office. Assuming there are at least 10 messages posted per week, and they are changed weekly, this will take 2.5 to 5 hours of staff time. Bulletin Board information could be run at specific times or continuously throughout the day and night.

In addition to a basic bulletin board, staff believes it would be beneficial to make rebroadcasts of Council meetings available on Channel 27. To do so, however, will require considerable additional costs and logistics. Rebroadcasting of meetings over cable television would require the procurement of equipment in the range of \$75,000. Since this is not a viable option, staff recommends the option of web streaming.

#### Web streaming

The ability to web stream the City Council meetings live and also have them available on demand would be of benefit to people who cannot see the cable broadcast, such as anyone who does not subscribe to cable, interested parties outside the City during a Council meeting, such as residents traveling, interested parties not based in the City and staff members who live outside the City limits.

While this would be of benefit to the community, the project would take significant staff time and financial resources for the initial setup if located in-house. The initial setup of hardware and connectivity issues would be approximately 2 weeks, weekly staff time estimated at 15-20 hours per week and the financial impact would be approximately \$5000 in the first year.

There are alternatives that include an outside vendor; two have been identified for the purpose of this report. Vendor "A" would house, manage and maintain the hardware and software as well as the web streaming for a total cost of \$600 per month and give us the ability to web stream two meetings per month. Vendor "B" would locate hardware and software onsite, provide training and installation for a cost of \$11,462.45 plus \$650 per month for managed services. Vendor "B" would also allow for unlimited broadcasts and archive meetings for up to one year. These alternatives would mean that

no staff time would be necessary to maintain the hardware and software. There would also be no impact on the throughput speed of the internal City network.

### **Fiscal Impact**

The total cost of implementation of a Bulletin Board system is a one-time expenditure not to exceed \$2,500. There are additional costs of staff time to maintain current and timely information.

The estimated costs for a Web streaming system based on current information ranges from \$7,200 for a totally managed system offsite to \$19,262.45 a system located onsite and managed for the first year.

The purchase of hardware and software for these items could be charged to the Technology Master Plan (620-4142-2142-9040), which has \$75,000 budgeted in FY05. However, this money has been allocated for a telephone voice response system in the adopted Technology Master Plan. Funding for something else would necessitate reprioritizing the Technology Master Plan which could be undertaken by staff at Council's direction. Alternatively, this project could be funded from the Council contingency which has a remaining balance of \$25,000.

### **Recommendation**

Staff recommends implementing a static Bulletin Board when the City Manager's office is fully staffed. Staff also recommends web streaming proceed in FY06 pending approval of funding.

### **Alternatives**

1. Refer Bulletin Board project back to staff for more information.
2. Refer Web streaming project back to staff for more information.
3. Direct staff to take no action at this time and place the web-streaming item for consideration during the next budget review.
4. Direct staff to come back with an update of the Technology Master Plan to provide for web streaming.
5. Provide other direction

Respectfully submitted,

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